

February 16, 2016

Testimony Regarding the Elimination of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant
H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.

Submitted by Kelcey Perez, Club Member, Boys & Girls Club of New Haven

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Boys & Girls Club of New Haven and clubs throughout the state about this very important matter. My name is Kelcey Perez.. I am 15 years old and I am a sophomore at New Haven Academy. I have been attending the Boys & Girls Club of New Haven for 6 years. During this time the club has provided me with many priceless experiences and opportunities. I have participated in almost every program that the Club provides, including Smart Moves, which has helped me to make better decisions and the Keystone Club, where I have learned important leadership skills. I am currently the New Haven Club's Youth of the Year – the highest honor any Club member can receive.

I truly grew up in the Club. In fact, I would never have the courage to speak before you tonight if it wasn't for the Club. There was a time when I didn't feel like I was good enough to speak at the State Capitol. The staff at the Club have always encouraged me and helped me to gain confidence. Because of the Club, I know that there is nothing that I cannot accomplish.

The Boys & Girls Club of New Haven is truly a family. It is my second family. I know that speak for my fellow Club members when I say that I could not imagine my life without the Club. It is a place that we depend on. Not matter what, the Club is always there. It means so much to so many kids in New Haven.

The Club has helped me to develop better study habits, learn discipline, improve my public speaking, give back to my community – all things that I will need to be successful in college and beyond. Today, I am mentor, sharing my knowledge and experiences with younger kids at the Club. I see them and remember how I was when I first walked into the Club. I tell them that they can become whatever they want to become. The Club inspires dreams.

Today, I am using my voice to give back to the Club just a little of what they have given me. I am using my voice to speak up and advocate for the things I believe in. I know my voice and opinions can impact lives and that is why I am here to day – to speak for kids whose voice is not heard and stand up for kids that need club the most.

I have come a long way and the Boys & Girls Club of New Haven has played a big part in helping me to become the young woman I am today. The staff at the Club believes in me and I believe in myself. For many of us, the Club is so much more than a place where you send children after school for safety and supervision, it is a place where "Great Futures" really do begin. Cutting funds would negatively affect the kids that need us most, the after school program and so many other programs that kids and parents rely on. Please consider finding a way to restore this funding. Clubs are making a difference. It has truly made a difference for me.

Thank you.